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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on Prevention of
Discrimination and Protection
of Minorities
Working Group on Indigenous Populations
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REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS PERTAINING TO THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS OF INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS, INCLUDING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND STATES

Note by the Secretary-General

Information received from Governments

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Introduction

1. By its resolution 1982/34 of 7 May 1982, the Economic and Social Council authorized the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to establish annually a working group on indigenous populations to review developments pertaining to the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigneous populations, including information requested by the Secretary-General annually, and to give special attention to the evolution of standards concerning the rights of indigenous populations.

2. The Sub-Commission, in its resolution 1991/30 of 29 August 1991, requested the Secretary-General to transmit the report of the Working Group on its ningth session (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1991/40/Rev.1) to Governments for specific comments and suggestions for the completion of the first reading of the text of the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1991/40/Rev.1, annex II) and the beginning of the second reading at the tenth session. The Commission on Human Rights endorsed this request in its resolution 1992/44 of 3 March 1992. In accordance with these resolutions, appropriate communications were sent to Governments. The present document contains replies received as of 12 May 1992. Further replies, if any, will be included in addenda to this document.

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Thailand*

Hill-tribe welfare and development

Background

1. One of the great sources of pride of the Thai people is their rich and diverse ethnic and cultural heritage. The hill-tribes of Thailand and their distinct lifestyles are part of this colourful heritage. These tribes are among the many ethnic groups that constitute Thai society. They are not considered to be minorities nor indigenous people but as Thais who are able to enjoy fundamental rights and are protected by the laws of the Kingdom as any other Thai citizen.

2. According to a recent survey, there are some 500,000 hill-tribesmen in Thailand belonging to nine different hill-tribes, namely the Hmong, Yao, Lisu, Akha, Lahu, Karen, Khamu, H'Tin and the Luha, each tribe having inherited its own distinct language, customs, norms, traditions and lifestyle.

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* Information contained herein was furnished by the Department of Public Welfare and the Office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Interior of Thailand.

3. The hill-tribes of Thailand can be found in the remote areas of the northern, central and southern regions of Thailand, spread out over 20 provinces. Because of the lack of contact with the outside world, some of these hill-tribes have, in the past, engaged in certain practices, for instance shifting agriculture and opium cultivation, unconscious of and unable to comprehend the environmental and social repercussions of their livelihood. Moreover, because a majority of the hill-tribe people are illiterate and lack the necessary knowledge either to earn a decent income or to look after the sanitary conditions of their own community, they often live in conditions of poverty, poor health and malnutrition.

Government policies and measures to assist the hill-tribes

4. In 1959, the National Committee on Hill-Tribes was established to formulate and review national policies to address the welfare and development needs of the hill-tribes. The policies and government activities that have been launched since have been oriented towards improving the quality of life of the hill-tribes based on their self-reliance and encouraging them to become productive and responsible Thai citizens, while at the same time enabling them to maintain their cultural identity in a modernizing world. These policies were also aimed at finding an alternative means of livelihood for the hill-tribes in order to end their unconscious destruction of the ecological and social environment. Regional, provincial and district committees have also been created to support and complement national policies in this regard.

5. The objectives of hill-tribe welfare and development policies of the Royal Thai Government include, inter alia, the following:

(a) Allocation of land for settlement and agriculture to the hill-tribes in order to secure their permanent settlement in fertile areas;

(b) Organization of the administrative structure of the hill-tribe communities, in order to promote their self-administration as well as their awareness of and participation in the affairs of the Kingdom;

(c) Introduction of economic and social development that are geared towards the conservation of natural resources into the region where the hill-tribes live, in order to enable them to benefit from and to promote their appreciation of their natural and social environment;

(d) Enforcement of law and order.

6. Hill-tribe development projects which have been launched as a result of the hill-tribe welfare and development policies are comprehensive in scope and includes occupational and social development.

7. Occupational development programmes undertaken by the Department of Public Welfare are aimed at promoting the application of modern agricultural techniques by the hill-tribes, such as the cultivation of high-yield cash-crops based on crop rotation methods, for immediate consumption and income generating purposes.

8. Social development programmes have been undertaken by the Department of Public Welfare in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Health, and include the provision of education, medical programmes and primary health care, family-planning services, sanitation and water supply programmes, and social development training in such areas as public health care, village development, farming, etc.

9. Furthermore, special projects to benefit the hill-tribes have also been launched, some of which are under royal patronage, and others being undertaken in cooperation with other friendly Governments. These projects include: The Royal Initiation Projects, the Thai-Australian Highland Development Projects, the Thai-Norway Highland Development Project, the Thai-German Highland Development Project.

Results of hill-tribe welfare and development policies

10. As a result of the above-mentioned policies of the Royal Thai Government, the well-being of the hill-tribes in Thailand has improved to the point where they stand a better chance not only to preserve and develop their own culture but also to contribute towards the development of the Kingdom.

11. Hill-tribes in Thailand have become more conscious of the need to preserve the environment and have shifted away from destructive methods of agriculture towards those that are more permanent and environmentally sound.

12. Hill-tribes have been able to earn a higher income through the introduction of high-yield cash-crop cultivation which has superseded the traditional cultivation of opium.

13. An increasing number of hill-tribesmen are benefiting from their access to educational facilities and enjoy a healthier life.

14. Hill-tribes are beginning to learn modern ways of managing the affairs of their community and have become more knowledgeable of the affairs of the Kingdom.